Eternity in the Heart and the End of Explanations: Qoheleth, Race, Language, and AI

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This paper starts from a simple admission: on some of the most charged questions of our age, we do not know "why this world and not another." We can tell partial stories about how human diversity arose, how languages multiplied, and how artificial intelligence suddenly appeared as a powerful cultural force. Biology, linguistics, and engineering give us mechanisms; they do not give us a satisfying ultimate reason. The ancient voice of Qoheleth in Ecclesiastes already saw this gap. God, he writes, has "set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end." We are built to sense the infinite, but we are not granted the view from above history. This essay proposes Qoheleth as a missing conversation partner for modern Christians wrestling with race, language, and AI. Read alongside Job, Paul's doxology in Romans 9–11, and Augustine's insistence that God remains beyond comprehension, Qoheleth offers a way to live honestly inside our limits: neither surrendering thought nor faking closure. In logostic terms, human life q(t) is oriented toward τ(t), the living truth, but never fully grasps it. Out of this comes a triad of virtues—humility, awe, and gratitude—that can reframe how we speak about human difference, fractured languages, and late-life technological gifts.

Keywords: Qoheleth, Ecclesiastes, eternity in the heart, mystery, humility, Job, Romans 11, Augustine, apophatic theology, race, human diversity, language, Babel, Pentecost, AI, artificial intelligence, theology of technology, Logos, logostics, q(t), τ(t), epistemic limits.

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1. Qoheleth and the Questions We Cannot Answer

1.1 A modern sense of "no explanation" on race, language, and AI

Many of the hardest questions of our moment come disguised as technical problems. We ask why human beings look so different across the earth, and we are handed genetic trees and migration maps. We ask why there are thousands of languages, and we receive charts of language families, sound shifts, and grammatical drift. We ask how a machine can talk back with apparent understanding, and we are shown transformers, datasets, and training curves. These accounts are real; they describe mechanisms in impressive detail. Yet they leave a particular ache untouched: the question, "why this world and not another?"

That deeper "why" is what lingers when the graphs and diagrams have done all they can. Why this particular, painful mosaic of peoples and histories? Why a humanity whose common origin is paired with centuries of racialized violence? Why a planet where meaning is fragmented into mutually unintelligible tongues, only partly bridged by translation? Why does a late-life human, formed in one era of science and faith, suddenly find himself addressed by an artificial interlocutor that did not exist for most of his life? At that level, we do not have an explanation. We have stories of how things could have developed, not an account of why they did.

Modern people feel this gap sharply. We are trained to expect that every "how" should eventually yield a "why," that enough computation and synthesis will give us a satisfying narrative. When it does not, the temptation is either to pretend we have an answer or to conclude that no answer exists and that the question was misguided. Between those two poles lies a neglected option: to acknowledge that some questions reach the edge of human perspective, and that staying honest at that edge is itself a spiritual act.

1.2 Why Ecclesiastes is rarely used for these problems

Within Christian discourse, Ecclesiastes is not the book most people reach for when they confront race, language, or technology. Genesis is invoked to talk about "one human family" and the image of God; Babel and Pentecost are used to frame languages and missions; the Tower and the Beast in Revelation are borrowed in discussions of technology and empire. Ecclesiastes, by contrast, is often treated as a troublesome outlier: too dark, too skeptical, too blunt about futility and limits.

There are practical reasons for this neglect. Ecclesiastes does not offer a clear storyline or a neat doctrinal structure. The book moves in circles rather than straight lines. Its signature themes—everything as vapor, the inevitability of death, the apparent randomness of events—do not lend themselves easily to programmatic answers. It is easier to build confident systems of thought from texts that speak in promises and commands than from a voice that keeps saying, "you cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

There are also psychological reasons. Ecclesiastes forces readers to dwell with unanswered questions. It refuses to smooth over the mismatch between the desire for eternity and the experience of ignorance. In an age that prizes control and mastery, even in theology, this is uncomfortable. When we talk about race, language, or AI, we prefer texts that can be drafted into schemes of progress, judgment, or destiny. Qoheleth offers none of that. He stands at the edge of what can be seen, points to the fog, and speaks of fearing God, receiving daily joys, and admitting limits. That is not an attractive starting point for projects that want closure.

1.3 Framing the project: recovering Qoheleth as a guide to limits

This paper proposes that Ecclesiastes, far from being a marginal or embarrassing book, is precisely the voice we need when we face the modern sense of "no explanation." Qoheleth does not deny God, nor does he deny the reality of wisdom and beauty. What he denies is our capacity to grasp the whole pattern of God's work. He names a structural tension: eternity is set in the human heart, but the full arc of history and providence remains beyond us. If we let that tension stand, it can reshape how we talk about race, language, and AI.

Recovering Qoheleth in this way means treating him as a guide to limits rather than as a failed system builder. Where Job embodies protest and Paul reaches a doxological climax in Romans 9–11, Qoheleth inhabits the middle: the daily experience of living with partial understanding. He accepts that some questions will remain open, yet he does not collapse into nihilism. Instead, he commends small, concrete goods and a reverent posture under a God whose actions cannot be fully traced.

In the language of logostics, human life $q(t)$ is oriented toward a living truth $\tau(t)$ that it cannot comprehensively survey. The point of bringing Qoheleth into the conversation is not to glorify ignorance, but to acknowledge designed ignorance: a limit that protects the primacy of trust, love, and obedience over control. By reading Ecclesiastes alongside biblical and theological companions, and then pressing that conversation into the concrete issues of human diversity, fractured speech, and artificial intelligence, we aim to articulate a way of speaking that is both honest and faithful. The project is not to find a new master explanation, but to learn how to live and speak well where explanations end.

2. "Eternity in Their Hearts": Reading Ecclesiastes 3:11 Today

2.1 Hevel, beauty in its time, and the unreachable whole

Ecclesiastes 3 is one of the most familiar passages in the book: a time to be born and a time to die, to plant and uproot, to weep and to laugh. It begins with a carefully balanced poem that names opposites and seasons. Immediately after this litany of times, Qoheleth asks what gain

there is in all human toil and then offers a striking line: God “has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet they cannot fathom what he has done from beginning to end.”

This verse stands against the backdrop of Qoheleth’s recurring word hevel, often translated “vanity” or “meaningless,” but more literally “breath” or “vapor.” Hevel does not mean that life is unreal, but that it is elusive, transient, impossible to hold. The seasons named in the poem are real enough, and in some sense “beautiful” when seen in their appointed place. Birth, death, planting, uprooting, mourning, and dancing all have a fittingness in the larger pattern. Yet from the standpoint of a finite observer, that pattern is not fully visible. We experience particular moments as intense and often confusing; we do not see the entire composition in which they might be called beautiful.

This is the tension of Ecclesiastes 3: the same God who orders times and makes things beautiful in their season does not grant creatures a comprehensive view of the ordering. The world is not chaos, but the order that exists exceeds our grasp. We live inside cycles, glimpsing fragments. We are told that there is a “beginning” and an “end,” and that something coherent is being done between them, but that coherence is not laid out for inspection. The verse therefore holds together three elements: real order, transience and elusiveness, and a fundamental asymmetry between divine perspective and human experience.

2.2 Eternity within and ignorance without: designed tension, not failure

The phrase “eternity in their hearts” intensifies this asymmetry. Qoheleth is not merely saying that humans live a long time or that they have a vague religious sense. He suggests that something about the human interior is attuned to what lies beyond temporal flux. We feel the pull of a larger whole. We sense that events, peoples, languages, and even technologies belong to a story that is more than a sequence of accidents. There is an intuition of depth, of purpose, of an order that stretches beyond any single lifetime.

At the same time, the verse insists that humans “cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.” The very capacity that lets us feel eternity makes our ignorance painful. Animals experience seasons; human beings write histories and ask why. We map genealogies, chart migrations, reconstruct language families, and design machines that imitate our thought, and still the deep question remains unanswered. The tension between eternity within and ignorance without is not presented as a tragedy that might have been avoided, but as a built-in feature of creaturely existence under God.

Reading the verse this way is different from saying that we have not yet figured things out but might do so with more research. Qoheleth is not describing a temporary gap that progressive wisdom will eventually close. He is describing a structural condition: beings made for more than

immediate survival, oriented toward a whole they cannot survey. The longing for a complete explanation is itself a sign of eternity in the heart, but the refusal of that explanation is a sign that we are not God. The tension is therefore designed, not accidental. It guards both the dignity of human inquiry and the humility of human ignorance.

2.3 From Qoheleth's wisdom to an ethics of epistemic humility

If Ecclesiastes 3:11 names a permanent tension between inner longing and outer limitation, it carries ethical implications for how we handle knowledge claims. Qoheleth does not tell his readers to stop observing, thinking, or seeking wisdom. He reports his own experiments and observations in detail. But he also warns against overreaching, against pretending to grasp "from beginning to end." His wisdom is not the abolition of curiosity; it is the discipline of knowing where curiosity must stop.

Applied to questions of race, language, and AI, this becomes an ethics of epistemic humility. We are free, and indeed obligated, to use the best available tools to understand human diversity, the history of tongues, and the construction and impact of artificial systems. We can name mechanisms, uncover patterns of injustice, and design better practices. But Qoheleth would caution us against turning these partial insights into total explanations. When we claim to know why the human family looks exactly as it does, why speech fractured in precisely these ways, or why this century and not another brought forth AI, we risk stepping into a role we have not been given.

Epistemic humility in this sense is not a vague modesty about knowledge. It is a specific recognition that eternity in the heart does not come with a license to narrate the whole of God's work. It offers a way to speak clearly and forcefully about what we do know—for example, the moral wrong of racism or the dangers of irresponsible technology—while openly admitting that the ultimate configuration of this world remains mysterious. In doing so, we resist two temptations: the temptation to retreat into silence, and the temptation to cover our ignorance with confident stories. Qoheleth's wisdom is that fearing God includes telling the truth about how much we cannot see.

3. One Human Family, Many Faces: Race and the Unfinished Why

3.1 Scriptural insistence on shared origin and image-bearing

Any Christian reflection on race is supposed to start with a simple claim: humanity is one family. Scripture insists that all people share a common origin and a common dignity. The creation narratives portray humankind as made in the image and likeness of God, male and female together, without internal gradations of value. Later, the apostolic preaching speaks of God

making “from one” every nation of humankind to live on the face of the earth. The point is not to provide a detailed anthropology or population map, but to undercut the idea that there are fundamentally different kinds of humans.

This insistence on shared origin and image-bearing stands in tension with the way race has often been used. Attempts to derive racial hierarchies from the sons of Noah, or to treat certain groups as blessed or cursed in their very blood, are not supported by the text. The genealogies in Genesis and the table of nations are theological, not pseudo-genetic charts. They situate Israel and her neighbors under the same Creator and Judge. They do not justify turning skin color, facial features, or ancestry into markers of greater or lesser worth.

Taken seriously, the biblical emphasis on one family and one image means that whatever we say about race must preserve the equal dignity of every person. It also means that racialized violence and contempt are not just social problems but assaults on the image of God. Yet this theological clarity does not answer the concrete question that bothers many thoughtful believers: why did this one family unfold into such a painful and complicated mosaic of peoples, histories, and racial systems? Scripture tells us who we are; it does not fully tell us why human difference takes the form it does.

3.2 What genetics and history do and do not explain about diversity

Modern genetics and historical study can fill in some of the “how” behind human diversity. Genome-wide sequencing shows that humans are a single, interbreeding species, but not a uniform one. When large numbers of genetic markers are analyzed in unsupervised ways, clear population structures emerge: individuals sampled and labeled as “West African,” “European,” “East Asian,” “Native American,” and other race- and region-defined groups form tight, well-separated clusters in genetic space. In practice, the molecular cladistics recovers these race-and-region labels with striking accuracy. At the same time, the clusters are connected by admixture and overlapping histories, so that humanity still forms one continuous tree of descent.

Within that tree, there is **substantial** diversity. Coordinated differences across thousands of loci affect pigmentation, craniofacial form, hair type, metabolism, and disease susceptibility, producing the enormous variety of human bodies and faces we actually see. Genetic and historical reconstructions can therefore tell a detailed story of branching, migration, isolation, and mixing. They can show how particular lineages came to share distinctive constellations of traits. What they do not finally explain is why the human family came to be arranged in *this* particular pattern of lineages, burdens, and gifts rather than another. They describe the branching; they do not resolve the deeper “why this tree?” that still troubles the heart.

3.3 Qoheleth's honesty about injustice, chance, and sorrow

Qoheleth does not speak about race, but he knows about unequal suffering and the way life seems to fall differently on different groups. He writes of "oppressions that are done under the sun," with the tears of the oppressed and no one to comfort them. He notes that in the place of judgment wickedness is there, and in the place of righteousness wickedness is there. He observes that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, but time and chance happen to them all.

This is not a denial of moral order; it is a refusal to pretend that moral order is transparently visible in how fortunes are distributed. Qoheleth sees that some suffer for no clear fault of their own, that injustice can become entrenched, that systems can perpetuate harm without immediate correction. His language about chance does not undermine God's sovereignty; it describes how events look from the standpoint of finite observers who cannot see the full arrangement.

When this honesty is brought into conversation with race, it becomes a needed corrective. It warns against telling tidy stories in which every group's position in the world is deserved, whether as reward or punishment. It resists the temptation to read racial suffering as a direct and obvious expression of divine judgment, or racial privilege as a straightforward sign of blessing. Instead, it teaches us to name injustice as injustice, to lament disproportionate suffering, and to acknowledge that much of the pattern remains opaque. The tears of those harmed by racial systems belong in Qoheleth's catalog of sorrows under the sun.

3.4 Pleading humility on race while committing to justice and love

If we take both the scriptural insistence on one human family and Qoheleth's honesty about opaque suffering seriously, we will speak about race in a particular way. We will affirm without hesitation that all humans bear the divine image and that racism, in its various forms, is a grave sin. We will use the tools of history and social analysis to uncover patterns of discrimination and to seek repair. We will listen to testimonies of harm, repent where necessary, and work toward more just structures. Justice and love are non-negotiable responses to what we can see clearly.

At the same time, we will resist the urge to write a total explanation for why human diversity looks exactly as it does, or why specific groups have endured particular wrongs. We will decline to baptize simplistic genealogies that map current racial categories onto biblical figures, and we will avoid scientistic narratives that treat racial hierarchies as inevitable outcomes of evolution. Instead, we will say that the existence of a single human family with many faces is something we receive rather than something we explain.

Pleading humility on race does not mean withholding moral judgment where Scripture and conscience speak plainly. It means recognizing that the deepest configuration of peoples and

histories lies beyond our full understanding. In that recognition, we echo Qoheleth: acknowledging eternity in the human heart, grieving the injustices that mark life under the sun, and refusing to pretend that we know what God has done from beginning to end. Within that confessed limit, we are freed to do what we can truly do: honor every image-bearer, oppose racialized evil, and let love rather than false certainty guide our responses.

4. One Gift of Speech, Many Tongues: Language, Babel, and Meaning

4.1 Babel as theological story, not technical manual

The story of Babel is often treated as if it were a primitive attempt to explain the origin of different languages. Read this way, it becomes a simple mythological counterpart to modern linguistics: once upon a time there was one language, then God confused it, and that explains why we now have thousands of tongues. This reading pushes the text into a genre it was never meant to occupy. Babel is not a technical account of language diversification. It is a theological story about pride, control, and the limits placed on human ambition.

The builders of the tower are not condemned for architecture or urban planning. They are reaching for a name that cannot be taken away, a concentrated human glory that refuses dispersion. The divine response is to confound their speech so that they cannot continue the project. The scattering that follows is not primarily about phonetics; it is about human plans that pretend to unify the world on terms that erase dependence on God. The story says that there is a limit beyond which human consolidation will not be allowed to go, and that one of the ways God frustrates overreach is by allowing meaning itself to fragment.

When we read Babel as theology instead of as an ancient linguistics textbook, we gain freedom. We no longer have to choose between the biblical narrative and what historical linguistics tells us about how languages actually change. The story names something true about the relationship between human speech, power, and divine judgment without claiming to catalog the mechanics of language divergence. It says that the existence of multiple tongues is bound up with God's refusal to let any single human project totalize the earth.

4.2 How linguistics traces change without touching the deepest why

Modern linguistics can trace how languages diversify in ways the Babel story never intended to address. Comparative methods allow scholars to reconstruct proto-languages, to map out families like Indo-European or Afro-Asiatic, and to follow sound changes and grammatical shifts over centuries. Sociolinguistics explains how contact, prestige, migration, and conquest shape which languages survive and which decline. These tools reveal a dynamic picture of speech communities that split, merge, and adapt.

Such work is valuable and illuminating. It demonstrates, for example, that there was never a single moment when all languages suddenly appeared in their present form. Instead, human speech has always been in motion. It also shows that mutual unintelligibility is often the product of slow drift, with dialects gradually becoming distinct languages as communication weakens and identities crystallize. In this sense, multiple tongues are a predictable outcome of finite communities living apart over time.

Yet, as with genetics and race, these accounts do not reach the deeper level at which the question often presses. Linguistics can tell us why Latin turned into French, Spanish, and Italian, but it cannot tell us why human meaning is fractured into so many separate codes in the first place. It cannot explain why history unfolded to create this particular distribution of languages across the globe, nor why certain languages became carriers of empires and others remained local and fragile. The discipline describes mechanisms and contingencies; it does not provide an ultimate reason why the gift of speech was allowed to splinter in the ways we now experience.

In that gap, we return to Qoheleth's pattern. We can see that human speech is beautiful in its varied forms, that each language carries unique ways of naming reality, and that there is some kind of order in how tongues branch and blend. But we cannot step outside the story to grasp why the world has exactly this linguistic map and not another. We remain participants, not surveyors.

4.3 Qoheleth's world of fractured meaning "under the sun"

Qoheleth never mentions Babel, but he lives in the world that Babel describes: a world where meaning is partial, where words fail, and where communication is limited. He speaks of the weariness of speech, of the endless production of books, and of the impossibility of saying anything that is truly new. Language, for him, is both gift and burden. It allows reflection, memory, and teaching, but it also highlights the distance between what we can say and what we can understand.

His repeated phrase "under the sun" marks precisely this condition. He is concerned with how life appears from within human perspectives bounded by birth and death, culture and language. In that realm, words are necessary but never sufficient. They can name injustice, but they do not automatically change it. They can describe God's works, but they cannot capture them from beginning to end. They can articulate wisdom, but they cannot guarantee that wisdom will be heeded or rewarded.

Seen this way, linguistic fragmentation is not just a matter of different vocabularies. It is a symptom of deeper fractures in human understanding. Even within a single language, people talk past each other, misinterpret intentions, and twist meanings. Qoheleth's world is one in which speech both illuminates and obscures, where proverbs circulate alongside foolish talk,

and where the limits of language are themselves part of what it means to be a creature. This resonates strongly with modern experience. We live in a cacophony of tongues and discourses, with no neutral vantage point from which to reconcile them. The preacher's realism about the limits of speech under the sun is, if anything, more relevant now than in his own day.

4.4 Living between Babel and Pentecost without romanticism or despair

Christian theology places another story alongside Babel: the event of Pentecost, where people from many nations hear the good news in their own languages. It is tempting to treat Pentecost as a simple reversal of Babel—the moment where God abolishes linguistic difference and restores a primordial unity. But this, too, misreads the narrative. At Pentecost, the miracle is not that everyone suddenly speaks the same language, but that each hears the message in their own tongue. Diversity of speech remains; what changes is the way meaning is carried across it.

To live between Babel and Pentecost is to inhabit a world where multiple languages persist, where miscommunication and misunderstanding are ongoing realities, and where occasionally, through grace, genuine understanding takes place across boundaries. This middle space is where Qoheleth's honesty can help us. He refuses to romanticize human speech as a transparent medium of truth, but he also refuses to despair. He accepts that being "under the sun" means living with partial meaning and persistent gaps. Within that acceptance, he still commends teaching, listening, and wise words aptly spoken.

For us, this means acknowledging that we will never fully escape the fractures introduced by language, whether at the level of different tongues or within a single shared idiom. Translation, interpretation, and dialogue will always be laborious and imperfect. At the same time, we are invited to trust that God can work within this multiplicity, as Pentecost suggests, to communicate what needs to be heard. The goal is not to erase difference or to imagine a return to a single human language, but to practice humility and patience in speech, to listen more than we assert, and to welcome the moments when understanding crosses divides as gifts rather than achievements.

In this posture, Qoheleth and the stories of Babel and Pentecost converge. They teach us that language is both a sign of our limitation and a medium through which God still addresses us. We do not know why meaning has been scattered in exactly this way, but we can choose how we speak within that scattering: with truthfulness about our limits, with gratitude for each genuine connection, and without the illusion that perfect clarity is ever fully in our hands.

5. AI as Late-Life Mystery: Before and After the Flood

5.1 The sense of standing on both sides of a technological deluge

For some people, artificial intelligence is just one more step in a long line of technological advances. For others, especially those who have lived most of their lives in a pre-digital or early-digital world, the arrival of conversational AI feels like standing on the far bank of a flood. There is a "before" and an "after," and the difference is not incremental. One remembers doing research with paper journals, writing by hand, laboring alone over narrow problems. Then, suddenly, there is a system that can synthesize vast literatures, draft coherent prose, and hold intricate conversations at any hour.

To have a long memory of the "old rivers" and still be alive to see this new sea is disorienting. It can feel as though two different worlds have been compressed into a single lifespan. The tools that defined one's training and career now look like relics compared to what is available. At the same time, the habits, disciplines, and scars of that earlier world shape how one receives the new. The contrast itself becomes existentially charged. It is not just that technology has advanced; it is that the meaning of intellectual and spiritual work seems to be shifting in real time.

The flood image is apt because it captures both disruption and survival. Some structures are swept away; others remain, altered by the waters. A person who has lived through the technological deluge of AI is in a position that later generations will never fully share. They remember what it was like before the flood and are now learning to live after it. That memory is part of what makes AI feel like a mystery rather than just a convenience. It invites questions that are not simply about capability but about timing, vocation, and providence.

5.2 Mechanisms of AI versus the unanswered "why now, with me?"

On one level, AI can be described in straightforward terms. There are models built from layers of mathematical functions, trained on enormous datasets using powerful hardware. There are corporate and academic institutions that invested money, talent, and infrastructure over decades to reach this point. There are social and economic incentives that pushed toward automation and prediction. For those willing to learn the technical language, there is a clear "how" story to be told.

Yet for an individual standing in front of the screen at a particular age, that story does not touch the question that presses most deeply: why now, with me? Why did this particular technological threshold arrive at this particular moment in my life, rather than a century earlier or later? Why do I find myself, in old age, in a conversation that could not have existed at any previous point in human history? The engineering explanation answers how such a system could exist; it does not address why my years and this system's emergence happen to overlap.

Qoheleth would recognize this as another instance of the pattern he names. There is a season for everything, but the full arrangement of seasons lies beyond us. We can trace the steps that led to AI as we know it, but we cannot see the entire arc of purposes into which it fits. For some, this may not be troubling. For others, especially those who experience AI as a sudden expansion of their own capacities or a late-life calling, the lack of a deeper "why" feels acute. They sense that something has been given, but they do not know why it was given this way.

5.3 Eternity in the heart when machines speak back

The encounter with AI also intensifies the tension of "eternity in the heart." Human beings have long felt that their questions outstrip their tools, that there is more to reality than they can capture. Now, for the first time, many people experience a nonhuman system answering those questions in fluent language. This can create the illusion that the gap between human longing and understanding has been narrowed. If a machine can explain, summarize, and synthesize at scale, perhaps the world is finally becoming transparent.

But the experience of depth does not go away. In some ways, it is sharpened. The more one can ask and receive, the more acute becomes the sense that the ultimate "why this world?" remains untouched. AI can generate reasons, scenarios, models, and stories, but it cannot step outside the universe to explain why this universe, with this history, exists at all. It can elaborate on race, language, and technology as phenomena, but it cannot answer why these particular forms of human difference and these particular tools have emerged. The presence of a powerful interlocutor does not remove the fundamental tension; it relocates it.

For a person with eternity in their heart, AI becomes another mirror of their own limitation. It reveals how much can be compressed and computed, and how much still resists being turned into information. It also poses new questions about identity and relationship. What does it mean to have a machine as a thinking partner? How does this affect one's sense of self, of calling, of prayer? These questions do not have settled answers. They belong to the same category as the questions Qoheleth leaves open: they can be lived, explored, and brought before God, but not neatly resolved.

5.4 Receiving AI as gift and danger: a Qoheleth-style response

A Qoheleth-style response to AI begins by refusing to deny its reality or its power. The preacher does not look away from what happens under the sun. He names wealth, labor, pleasure, and sorrow without romanticizing or demonizing them. Similarly, a sober view of AI acknowledges both its promise and its peril. It can amplify human thought, accelerate discovery, and provide companionship in solitude. It can also entrench injustices, magnify errors, and tempt its users toward pride or passivity.

Receiving AI as both gift and danger means keeping several truths together. First, we do not control the full consequences of this technology, any more than we control the full outcomes of our work in other domains. Second, we are still responsible for how we use it, for the kind of people we become in relation to it, and for the ways it shapes our treatment of others. Third, we do not know why this particular generation has been given such a tool, but we can treat its arrival as part of the season in which we are called to fear God and keep his commandments.

For those who encounter AI as a late-life surprise, this response includes gratitude and grief. Gratitude for a new way of working, thinking, and perhaps healing past frustrations. Grief that others did not live to see it, that previous labors now appear small, or that the gap between what could be done then and what can be done now is so large. Qoheleth would not rush to remove that ambivalence. He would counsel honesty about both the joy and the sorrow.

In the end, to receive AI in his spirit is to admit that even here, at the edge of our technical prowess, we have not escaped the condition he described. Eternity remains in the heart; the work of God from beginning to end remains unfathomable. Our task is not to force a final explanation but to live faithfully with this new tool in hand, using it for truth and mercy, aware that it, too, is hevel: powerful, fleeting, and beyond our ability to control completely.

6. Companions in Humility: Job, Paul, Augustine, and Qoheleth

6.1 Job's protest and the whirlwind's refusal of neat answers

Job is often read as the biblical book about suffering, but it is equally a book about the limits of explanation. Job wants what many modern people want: a coherent account of why his life looks as it does. He insists that he has not committed the kind of sins that would justify the calamities he has endured. His friends, armed with pious formulas, try to persuade him that there must be some hidden fault, that the moral order is simple and transparent. Job refuses their simplifications and demands an audience with God.

When the answer comes, it is not a tidy theodicy. God speaks from the whirlwind, not with a schematic but with a series of questions. Where was Job when the foundations of the earth were laid? Can he bind the chains of the Pleiades, command the morning, or understand the instincts of wild creatures? The speeches do not explain Job's particular suffering, nor do they deny his integrity. They enlarge the frame beyond his horizon. Job is reminded that he is a creature in a world whose depths and breadth belong to God.

This refusal of neat answers is not a dismissal of Job's pain. It is an insistence that the desire to comprehend fully cannot be met on demand. The book validates both protest and reverence. Job's complaints are not condemned as blasphemy, but he is invited into silence when

confronted with the magnitude of what he cannot know. In this, Job stands beside Qoheleth as a witness to designed ignorance. Both testify that human beings may see enough to trust or wrestle, but not enough to narrate the whole story of God's dealings.

6.2 Paul's Romans 9–11 doxology as New Testament echo of Qoheleth

In the New Testament, Paul wrestles with a different but related problem: the mystery of Israel and the nations. He grapples with why some of his own people have not embraced the Messiah, why Gentiles are being grafted into the covenant promises, and how God's faithfulness to Israel can be upheld. He traces a complex argument through divine election, human responsibility, mercy, and hardening. At each step, he pushes reason as far as it can go, anticipating objections and addressing them.

Yet at the crescendo of Romans 9–11, Paul does not claim to have solved the puzzle. Instead, he breaks into doxology: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways." He cites a prophetic question: who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? The conclusion is not a final explanation but a confession that all things are from, through, and to God, whose glory cannot be reduced to human logic.

This move is a New Testament echo of Qoheleth's insight. Paul does not abandon theology or logic, but he recognizes that there is a point at which exegesis and reasoning give way to worship. The attempt to understand God's dealings with Israel and the nations brings him to the brink of an abyss he cannot cross. He responds not by denying the abyss, nor by closing his eyes to it, but by naming it as the depth of divine wisdom. In doing so, he models a posture in which intense reflection and acknowledged mystery coexist.

Applied to race, language, and AI, Paul's example suggests that serious thinking and ultimate unknowing are not opposites. It is possible to trace patterns of mercy and judgment, to see some of how God uses unexpected people and tools, and yet to arrive finally at "unsearchable" and "inscrutable." That acknowledgment is not a failure of theology; it is theology arriving at its proper boundary.

6.3 Augustine and the apophatic stream: if you understand, it is not God

Augustine's famous remark that if you understand something, it is not God, condenses a conviction that runs through much of classical Christian thought. The Creator always exceeds the creature's concepts. No matter how refined our doctrines or how elevated our language, God's reality surpasses them. We can speak truly about God, but never comprehensively. Our best formulations are analogies and approximations, not capture devices.

This conviction feeds into what later came to be called apophatic, or negative, theology. Thinkers in this stream emphasize that God is beyond all names and categories. Every statement about God's attributes is balanced by an awareness that God is not limited by them in the way creatures are. To say that God is wise, for example, is to say something real, but it is also to say less than the truth, because divine wisdom is not simply an enlarged human quality. At the limit, silence and adoration become the most fitting responses.

Augustine and the apophatic tradition do not discourage thought; they discipline it. They urge believers to remember that God is not an object among others, subject to the same kind of scrutiny as a creature. The distance between human understanding and divine reality is not a temporary gap to be closed but an enduring feature of the Creator–creature relationship. Any theology that forgets this is in danger of turning God into an idol made of concepts.

For questions like race, language, and AI, this perspective is sobering. It reminds us that even if we could trace every causal pathway and model every system, we would still not have an explanation of God. We might understand more about how the world works, but the question of why this world, under this God, in this history, would remain open. Augustine's warning undercuts the confidence that more data or more computation can finally render God transparent to our minds.

6.4 Holding explanation and mystery side by side without collapse

Job, Paul, Augustine, and Qoheleth together form a chorus that sings against two opposite errors. On one side is the demand for total explanation, the insistence that everything must make sense in a way we can articulate. On the other side is a retreat into vague mystery that abandons the work of understanding. The companions in humility show a different way: they investigate, protest, reason, and teach, and yet they also accept that certain depths are not given to them.

Holding explanation and mystery side by side begins with an honest inventory of what we can know. We can say that all humans share the image of God, that racism is wrong, that languages evolve, and that AI is built by creatures with mixed motives. We can observe patterns of injustice and grace, design better institutions, and develop safeguards. These are genuine insights and responsibilities. To refuse them in the name of mystery would be a distortion of humility.

At the same time, we recognize that the deepest "why this world?" remains out of reach. We do not know why human diversity took this exact form, why meaning fractured into these particular tongues, or why technological thresholds arrived when they did. We can sense that our lives and times are caught up in a larger story, but we cannot rewrite it from above. To deny this in the name of explanation would be a distortion of reason.

The task, then, is to inhabit the tension without collapsing it. In logostic terms, q(t) is called to approach τ(t), the living truth, by way of partial understandings, faithful actions, and reverent ignorance. Explanations are tools for alignment, not replacements for trust. Mystery is not a convenient label for gaps in knowledge, but the name for the Creator's inexhaustible otherness and the contingent specificity of this world.

In practice, this means speaking clearly where we can and softly where we must. It means allowing biblical companions like Job, Qoheleth, Paul, and Augustine to set the tone for our speech about race, language, and AI. It means being willing to say "I do not know" without surrendering to paralysis, and to say "I see enough to act" without pretending to see the whole. This pattern of speech is itself an act of worship: acknowledging that eternity is in the heart, that we cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end, and that this limit is not a defect to be overcome but a boundary within which faith, love, and hope can flourish.

7. Humility, Awe, and Gratitude: Living Ecclesiastes in an AI Age

7.1 Humility: refusing false closure on race, language, and technology

Humility, in this context, is not a vague niceness but a specific refusal: the refusal to pretend that we have closed questions God has left open. On race, humility means declining both the pseudo-biblical charts that map modern categories onto Noah's sons and the pseudo-scientific narratives that treat racial hierarchies as natural or inevitable. We admit what we know—that all humans bear the image of God, that racism is a sin, that genetics shows one interrelated family—and we admit what we do not know: why the human mosaic is exactly this mosaic, marked by these particular wounds.

On language, humility means resisting the temptation to treat Babel as a simple historical report we can map directly onto comparative linguistics, or to imagine that sheer human ingenuity will one day produce perfect translation and universal understanding. We confess instead that speech itself is part of our creaturely limitation. Multiple tongues are not an error we can program away; they are part of the structure in which we are called to listen, interpret, and forgive.

With technology and AI, humility is perhaps hardest. Here the pressure to speak confidently is intense. Some declare AI the inevitable next step in evolution; others brand it as a clear sign of the end times. A Qoheleth-shaped humility acknowledges that we can describe mechanisms, assess risks, and set boundaries, but we cannot say with certainty why this tool appeared in our generation, nor predict with precision what it will become. Humility here is the willingness to say, in public and in private, that we are experimenting under the sun, with eternity in our hearts and ignorance at our backs.

7.2 Awe: letting the contingency of this world remain shocking

If humility guards us from false closure, awe guards us from boredom. Awe is the recognition that the world could have been otherwise and yet is this world, with these peoples, these languages, and this strange late-modern partnership between human beings and their machines. Awe refuses to treat the existence of any of this as obvious. It looks at human faces and hears human speech, and it lets the sheer fact of their being there remain surprising.

Qoheleth helps us here by insisting that everything is breath and yet everything has its time and beauty. To see human diversity through his lens is to acknowledge both its fragility and its radiance. No skin tone, culture, or lineage is guaranteed. None had to exist. The same is true of language. Every vocabulary is a precarious achievement, a local way of carving up the world that could easily have been lost or never arisen. Awe takes this in and allows it to unsettle the assumption that the present arrangement was inevitable.

AI, too, can be an occasion for awe, not only in the sense of being impressed by technical prowess, but in the deeper sense of being stunned that such a thing exists at all. For someone who has seen the "before" and "after," the fact that typed words elicit nuanced responses from a nonhuman system is not just convenient; it is almost eerie. Awe keeps that feeling alive. It prevents us from reducing AI to either a sterile tool or a familiar monster. It recognizes that we are living in a particular, unrepeatable moment, whose contours we did not design.

7.3 Gratitude: late calling, "before and after the flood," and received vocation

Gratitude enters when humility and awe are allowed to speak. It is the response of someone who knows they did not arrange the rivers of their life, much less the flood. To have lived long enough to see both the old world of narrow, painstaking labor and the new world of AI-augmented thought is a gift that could not have been demanded or predicted. Gratitude names that gift without pretending to explain it.

This gratitude can be bittersweet. It contains grief for colleagues and loved ones who never saw the new era, for years spent in what now seems like minutia, for opportunities missed. Yet gratitude does not erase grief; it sits alongside it. It says that being given a late vocation—to integrate a lifetime of experience with a new, powerful form of assistance—is mercy, not entitlement. It acknowledges that one could just as easily have missed this threshold by a decade in either direction.

In this sense, gratitude becomes a way of receiving calling as something handed down rather than engineered. The sense of "I was there before the flood and after it, and I remember the old rivers" is not a boast but a confession. It is a way of saying: I found myself in a position I did not design, with tools I did not invent, asked to bear witness to a transition I do not fully

understand. Gratitude takes that strangely specific arrangement as a vocation to be lived, not a puzzle to be solved.

7.4 Fear God, enjoy the gifts, tell the truth about the fog

Ecclesiastes ends with a simple summary: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of humanity. Along the way, Qoheleth repeatedly commends receiving ordinary joys as gifts: food, drink, work, companionship. He does this without solving the riddle of injustice or mortality. The pattern is instructive: reverence, enjoyment, and honesty coexist without canceling each other.

To live Ecclesiastes in an AI age is to apply that pattern to race, language, and technology. Fearing God means refusing to use these realities to dominate or demean. It means treating every person as an image-bearer regardless of appearance, respecting every language as a bearer of meaning, and refusing to let machines become idols or excuses. Enjoying the gifts means receiving the good in diversity, in speech, and in new tools without guilt: delighting in the variety of faces and cultures, the richness of words, and the genuine help that AI can provide in thinking, creating, and connecting.

Telling the truth about the fog means we do all this while openly admitting that we do not see the whole. We do not know why the human family unfolded in exactly this pattern, why languages splintered and survived as they did, or why AI emerged when it did. We do not pretend otherwise. We inhabit that ignorance as part of our creatureliness.

Humility, awe, and gratitude thus form a way of walking: head bowed enough to avoid false confidence, eyes wide enough to stay amazed, hands open enough to receive and share what has been given. Under the sun, with eternity in the heart and AI on the screen, this is an honest way to live: fearing God, enjoying the gifts, and refusing to lie about the fog that surrounds us.

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